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Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03
NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11 HA-05
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----------078692 060138Z /73
R 052042Z JUN 78
FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8329
INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA
AMEMBASSY MANAGUA
AMEMBASSY PANAMA
AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE
AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA
USCINCSO QUARRY HEIGHTS CZ
DIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN SALVADOR 2841

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, SHUM, ES
SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS DIALOGUE WITH GOVERNMENT OF EL SALVADOR

REF: SAN SALVADOR 2526

1. SINCE FIRST COMMUNICATING TO PRESIDENT ROMERO
OUR DIFFICULTY ON HUMAN RIGHTS GROUNDS IN
SUPPORING UPCOMING IFI LOANS FOR EL SALVADOR
(STATE 103956 AND SAN SALVADOR 2037), I HAVE BEEN
SEIZED OF HIS REQUEST THAT I DISCUSS WITH CERTAIN
OF HIS TOP ADVISORS WHAT MIGHT BE DONE ALONG THE LINES
OF PARA 4 STATE 103956 TO SO IMPROVE THE RECORD AS
TO AFFECT USG ATTITUDES. AN INITIAL SUCH DISCUSSION
REPORTED IN SAN SALVADOR 2526 WAS HELD WITH THE
MINISTERS OF JUSTICE AND LABOR. ON FRIDAY, JUNE 2,
I INVITED VICE PRESIDENT ASTACIO, MINISTER OF INTERIOR
GENERAL ROJAS, AND MINISTER OF PLANNING TO MY
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HOME FOR LUNCH, WHICH TURNED INTO A THREE-AND-ONE-HALF
HOUR DISCUSSION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS PROBLEM.

2. IT WAS A RATHER FULL DISCUSSION WHICH RANGED OVER
THE WHOLE QUESTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS. I EMPASIZED THE
RELEVANCE OF HUMAN RIGHTS PERFORMANCE TO THE STATE
FO ANY NATION'S BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH THE US AND

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ALSO THE INTERRELATIONSHIP WITH OUR ABILITY AND READINESS TO COOPERATE IN TERMS OF ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE IN ITS MANY FACETS AND FORMS.

3. TO DRAMATIZE MY POINT, I LED MY THREE GUESTS ACROSS THE ROOM TO A DISPLAY OF APPROXIMATELY THIRTY PUBLIC DOCUMENTS ALL COMMENTING ADVERSELY ON THE STATE OF HUMAN RIGHTS OBSERANCE IN EL SALVADOR. INCLUDED WERE NEW YORK TIMES COLUMNS, WOLA REPORTS, AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CASES, THE PRELIMINARY ANDERSON REPORT, ETC. AT MY INVITATION, EACH OF THEM SLECTED A FEW ITEMS FOR HASTY PERUSAL. I EMPHASIZED TO THEM THAT THESE WERE ONLY A SMALL FRACTION OF WHAT WAS BEING CIRCULATED AMONG FOREIGN AUDIENCES. WHILE THERE MIGHT WELL BE SOME EXAGGERATION, I SAID, THE CUMULATIVE IMPACT WAS AN OVERWHELMING ONE. AS A RESULT, THE GOES IMAGE ABROAD WAS SAGGING RATHER BADLY, WORLD OPINION WAS BEING ALIENATED, AND "YOU ARE LOSING THE BATTLE FOR PEOPLES' MINDS AND SYMPATHIES." TO REVERSE THIS TREND, I SUGGESTED, SOMETHING EFFECTIVE NEEDED TO BE DONE ABOUT BOTH THE REALITY AND THE IMAGE PROJECTED ABROAD OF HUMAN RIGHTS OBSERVANCE WITHIN EL SALVADOR. BUT TO SEEK TO DEAL ONLY WITH THE IMAGE WOULD BE A LOST CAUSE.

4. THE DISCUSSION WAS VERY MUCH GIVE AND TAKE. MY CONFIDENTIAL

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THREE LUNCHEON GUESTS ASSERTED THAT AS FAR AS THEY WERE CONCERNED GOOD HUMAN RIGHTS PERFORMANCE IS DESIRABLE PER SE AND SHOULD NOT COME ABOUT ONLY AS A MEANS OF SECURING LOANS OR CREDITS. THEY POINTED TO INCONSISTENCIES IN OUR APPLICATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY AND ECHOED INTERNATIONAL CHARGES THAT WE LEAN MORE HEAVILY ON SMALL, WEAK FRIENDS THAN ON POWERFUL ENEMIES OR STRATEGIC ALLIES. THEY REMINDED ME OF THE CURRENT WAVE OF VIOLENCE AND TERRORISM IN EL SALVADOR, THE THREE PROMINENT KIDNAPPINGS STILL OUTSTANDING, AND CRITICISM OF PRESIDENT ROMERO FOR HIS RESTRAINT IN THESE MATTERS, AND THE MOUNTING PRESSURES UPON ROMERO TO ACT LIKE A "STRONG" PRESIDENT. I COUNTERED BY QUOTING TO THEM INTELLIGENT AND INFORMED OBSERVERS WHO SEE THE LOCAL SCENE DETERIORATING BUT ATTRIBUTE MUCH OF THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THIS TO THE GOVERNMENT FOR HAVING ISOLATED ITSELF AND DRIVEN POPULAR SUPPORT INTO THE HANDS OF VIOLENCE-PRONE EXTREMISTS OF THE LEFT BY CLOSING OFF AVENUES OFR LEGITIMATE DISSENT, DIALOGUE, AND CONSTRUCTIVE COOPERATION.

5. AFTER LUNCH, I SHARED WITH MY VISITORS

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SOME IDEAS AS TO HOW HUMAN RIGHTS PERFORMANCE IN
THIS COUNTRY MIGHT BE IMPROVED. I TRIED TO EMPHASIZE
THE FEASIBLE AND TO DEFER TO SOME LATER STAKE THE
HHORNIER OF THE PROBLEMS. IN SO DOING, I STRESSED
THE NEED FOR PUTTING TOGETHER A "PACKAGE" OF
POSITIVE STEPS WHICH COULD BE HELD OUT AS EVIDENCE
OF MOVEMENT AND GOOD FAITH. I SINGLED OUT THE
MUCH-MALIGNED LAW FOR DEFENSE OF PUBLIC ORDER

AND REITERATED MY EARLIER ARGUEMENT (PARA 4 SAN SALVADOR
2526) THAT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD GAIN MUCH BY TAKING
STEPS TO CONVERT THIS INTO A CONSENSUS DOCUMENT RATHER
THAN CONTINUE TO HAVE IT ATTACKED FROM ALL SIDES-RESPONSIBLE
AND IRRESPONSIBLE AEIKE--AS A UNILATERALLY IMPOSED PIECE
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OF REPRESSIVE LEGISLATION.

6. BY THE END OF OUR CONVERSATION, ALL THREE GOES
OFFICIALS SEEMED SOMEWHAT IMPRESSED. I HAD DISTRIBUTED
SOME "NON-DOCUMENT" WORKING PAPERS, AND THE MINISTER
OF INTERIOR HAD TAKEN EXTENSIVE NOTES. THE VICE
PRESIDENT SAID THERE WAS OBVIOUSLY MUCHFOOD FOR
THOUGHT IN ALL THAT HAD BEEN DISCUSSED, AND HE SUGGESTED
THAT AFTER FURTHER RUMINATION ON THE SUBJECT WE ALL
MEET AGAIN. I HOPE WE PARTED FRIENDS AND WITH
OUR BASIS FOR WORKING TOGETHER IN THE FUTURE UNIMPAIRED.

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